

Lowell House Of Improvisation

Lance Gargoyle always dreamed of developing a improvisation company in Lowell ever since he first got involved in the theater and improvisation in 1994 when he was almost fifty years old. Being around the actors and attending so many classes and being in plays at Southwick Studios over the years was an experience that would change his life and inspire him forever.

But his real love was improvisation. His first class at Southwick was about Improvisation taught by Curt Miller, who would direct a summer production that Lance was in a few years later. His next ten week class was a scene study with Andrea Southwick in Brookline before she had a permanent study location in Watertown. It was there that he was told by another student Danny about improvisation and he started to check it out. Nothing that he was involved with in or around the Boston or Cambridge area was going on in Lowell or was even thought of by anyone or even considered.

After checking around with the actors and others at Southwick Studios it was recommended that he study improvisation with a woman named Marjorie Burren who taught the Keith Johnstone Method. After contacting her he was told to take a introductory class in improvisation before studying with her,. Which he did at Collenge/Pickman in Boston and was able to monitor a Keith Johnstone four day workshop in Boston. Keith Johnstone was the main person who's method was popular and who started Improv Sports.

Lance had originally got involved with the theater to enhance his music enrichment and since most of his musical creations were improvisations

studying acting improv was a perfect fit. He also took a workshop at The Mass College Of Art In Boston around the same time as studying with Marjorie

Burren. He studied with her for maybe two years which was about six or seven six week workshops and had also taken workshops at Southwick Studios in a variety of courses including scene study and others. Maybe four or five a year,

a few one day workshops and of course I was in several student productions

in the summer and got to be around actors and people who had a

great commitment to the arts and to the craft of acting. Improv with Marjorie was interesting but kinda corny after a while but what else was out there.

Where as at Southwick Studios it was like a family right from the start with everyone involved. He was in with the right people at the right time and it would never be the same years later but he got something he couldn't have found in Lowell then or especially now. Real creative people involved in the arts and in the their community. Students at Southwick took workshops and classes during the year and many of the same students were in the summer production.

It was a class that was from June til August with six performances at the end of rehearsals in a Theater in Wayland Massachusetts.

Every year Andrea would ask who would like to be in the Summer Productions

and would have audition for the roles in the play that she had chosen. She always had a good idea who would be in the cast and always selected a play that perfectly fit all the cast with everyone in equal roles. After being in only three classes Lance wasn't sure he was ready to be in the production but his good friend Danny, who he respected and hung out with said he should and he did.

He got his first role in that years student production and was cast in seven others in the following years. As time went on he got better roles as his abilities and confidence improved. His most memorable roles were as Eddie the Asshole, The Sewerman, Lomov in a Chekhov play The Marriage Proposal and as Caliban in The Tempest his last role at Southwick Studios before classes ended after 2002. He also had a role in a play in Lowell called The Dining Room

but it was not the same family feel as Southwick. It was in Lowell but it didn't have the same zing and complete genuineness but he met another actor named Rocky who would be his friend in Lowell after the play was over and for years to come. At Southwick Studios he felt instantly accepted. It was such a unique opportunity and he developed a lot but his real love was improvisation.

Southwick Studios had several one day workshops on Saturday and he had attended many including storytelling and others involving

theater. One Saturday

there was one called Introduction to Action Theater given by a woman named Sarah Hickler. It didn't take long into the workshop before Lance felt that this form of improvisation was what he was looking for. As Sarah spoke of the woman who developed Action Theater Ruth Zaporah he knew he had found an improvisation he could really learn from and enjoy developing. The class was out of sight and he was changed for life. Soon after Sarah and three other long time practitioners of Action Theater were giving a three day performance at a place in Boston called Mobius. Lance attended all three and was even more convinced that Action Theater was the route he needed to go. The performance was kinda like a David Lynch Film but ten times better and very captivating.

Lance took the next workshop when Ruth Zaporah came to Boston again.

After that three day workshop he started studying with her regularly for the next

five or six years. Once or twice a year Ruth would have a week long retreat in

Western Massachusetts at a place called Earth Dance. It was usually for seven to ten days and the first time Lance had been away from home for that length of time. Earth Dance was remote and had a house where visitors would sleep and eat and two large buildings for dance, performance and practice. He was there probably seven or eight times over the years and got to meet interesting people from around the country and around the world. Something else he would have never discovered or been involved with in Lowell. The Keith Johnstone Method, for him, was a pain in the ass to get comfortable practicing and developing. It was always about who you are, where you are, what you are doing.

Too much to think about for him. Action Theater was about things like sound, movement and narrative. And everything came from the gut. The atmosphere with Action Theater and the gatherings were like it was at Southwick Studios with the classes and Summer Productions. A regular group of people who got together to study and practice and enjoyed each others company and welcomed new comers regardless of how long they stayed. Every workshop he would meet new people and within a few days but usually within a few hours everyone involved felt connected. Luckily Lance was allowed by Ruth to film her a few times while she was there and the practice. He also filmed a lot around the wooded area. Its footage not for public release but is

great to look back on someday or private viewing.

After the Earth Dance days Ruth gave workshops in Boston at Boston College once or twice a year for four day workshops and Lance attended them for a few years before things started to slow down. It was always a great time every time getting together and seeing many people for years and new people getting involved also. Ruth was nice enough to let Lance film a four day workshop there and he has over eight hours. It is not for release but Lance always has it for private exhibit for students with Ruth's permission. Ruth rarely came to Boston for years but Lance attended another session many years later in around 2010.

It had a few familiar faces and a few new faces and it was nice to see Ruth again after all those years but the vibe had changed and so had he.

Lance was just a regular guy with a regular job. Most of the people he met through Southwick Studios and with Ruth Zaporah were usually professionals with college educations. Lance was a ninth grade drop out with no trade or formal education who really had no opportunities to expand his horizons or possibilities if he hadn't got involved with Southwick Studios and Action Theater.

Over the years Ruth has released several films and several books about Action Theater and her life. She continues teaching Action Theater around the country and the world and has regular sessions where she lives in New Mexico. With the Covid she now recently has regular sessions through online methods.

In 1999 Lance Gargoyle got his first computer and started putting his music on mp3.com, the largest music hosting at the time. Over three years he uploaded over 2000 of his original musical creations got over 100,000 downloads or plays and downloaded over 2000 songs from mp3.com for his private collection. He also networked with many other musicians and creative people from mp3.com. One person who he connected with and collaborated with was a person named Trio Quatro or Earworm who he stayed in contact with after mp3.com closed around 2003. Trio was from Columbia South Carolina and made music, art and film and created e-mail stories with Lance over the years. Lance started creating art with a program called Fireworks and later with a program called Zbrush. He started taking photos around Lowell and surrounding area and enhancing them with Zbrush for a unique effect and created a large digital library of images and photos that was into the thousands. He was a collector of many things and when he got

into something he really went to town. He started putting his images on Art sites and found the best one called Artwanted and started two sites. He got many good comments on his images from a lot of other artists and got to check out their art and comment on it. He had no training in art and had no drawing ability or interest in developing any but just creating from what he had and what he developed as he went along. He felt accepted in this creative area with the many artists on Art Wanted and still has two sites up there today under assumed names. His best internet connection Trio Quatro had several music sites on mp3.com and started making his home made movies from images he got from the internet and other places and called them Itty Biity Movies. They were the most creative and inventive little movies you could ever imagine. He made stop action movies and got into an internet site where you choose the scenes that were already created and put your own music and narrative. Trio was a pro at dialogue in his movies and was always spot on with the narrative and most of the time he was making it up for the first time or from simple crib notes. These later movies still get many plays into the tens of thousands on Youtube. He was a very good artist as well besides having a great imagination.

Lance and Trio or Earworm as he was also called started doing e-mail collaborations and developed stories by e-mailing back and forth. These became very useful in years to come because they are like a writing team of two people. Lance would send Trio packages with movies he enjoy and other things.

Around 2010 Trio went off the radar and Lance never heard from him again.

Lance Gargoyle was to become the guardian of Trio Quatros Music and Video Library along with their e-mail stories and someday bring them into the spotlight to give tribute to one of the most influential people he would ever know and be connected with.

Lance also started putting the projects he video recorded over the years on Youtube. Bands from the area and in Boston where he had filmed, films of him playing out and his liquid movies, which he created with Zbrush. He started a web site called laughingdervish.com that is still operational today that has his writings, links to his many music sites and Youtube sites and info about him and happenings in Lowell.

He had gotten involved with artists in the Lowell community around 2003 and in April of 2006 started renting a studio at Western Avenue Studios in Lowell

and really got to network with other creative people. He wasn't an artist per say but he had done digital art,taken tons of photos and had created sculptures from seaweed and broken lobsters traps he got at the beach that he had made years before. He was hoping to maybe have an opportunity and a place to bring what he had experienced outside of Lowell to his community that wasn't happening.

He dreamed of the day he could develop an improvisation company in Lowell

from what he had learned in Boston and Cambridge with all the Improvisation and theater training he had under his belt. He had been trying to get this going since 2004 when he started the Lowell House Of Improvisation. After all everything he did from music to art to films to writing was improvisation and that was what his real training was in and his first love. He missed those many years of training with Ruth Zaporah and those many summers at Southwick Studio with the plays and the exposure he got there. Boy to bring that back to Lowell would be the greatest thing that could happen to him and make all his training

and networking worthwhile.

His journey into the local world of the arts in Lowell started getting interesting

around 2005 when he started to explore what was happen in other mediums besides music,film and theater which were the areas he was most comfortable with and had the most experience doing. He joined the arts league of Lowell

for a while and had an article in the Lowell Sun about his photos of Lowell but

he never found a place that he could call home and really create and be comfortable. There wasn't any genuine place to perform his music. The artists

had their own thing going. If you hung around with them long enough you might get a chance to be in a show or maybe an exhibit but it was always about being judged and it always about being a contest. He was involved with a group exhibit where he meet some real genuine artists and had a good time. He got an amulet that was made by a woman artist who had a booth next to him which he still has today and wears all the time.

One afternoon while Lance was down at Garnicks Music chatting with Robert when a gentleman who was having something repaired there mentioned

a new place in Lowell that had artists and rooms to rent. His wife was

a member

there and it sounded worth checking out. He had a good friend Rich Farley who was an accomplished artist who went with him there to see what was going on.

The studio complex was on Western Avenue in an old mill building where Joan Fabrics once was and was called Western Avenue Studios. Every first Saturday of the month the complex had open studios where artists would open their studios to the public. Lance had been to a similar complex in Boston years before and had met many creative people while he was in Cambridge or Somerville. One guy that stood out was Wayne Viens who ran the Goodwill in Somerville where Lance dropped off books from Bryn Mawr Book Store on Saturdays. Wayne was a well known, talented and great manager. He knew local bands that would perform downstairs on a Saturday. He created tons of unique art and made window displays in the front windows on holidays like Halloween

and Christmas. Davis Square was vibrant. You could smell food from all the places that sold food. It was alive and Wayne was one reason it flowed so well and felt just right. He was not just in the community he was part of and involved

in his community. He was always on the move around the store and had his eye on everything that mattered included the people in his community and where he

was employed. He knew all the artists and bands around Cambridge and Boston and told Lance about one that had migrated from Boston to Lowell that was a bit of a shithead or better said a bighead who Wayne saw as someone who was out for the glory more than networking and being part of the community. Lance found that out some time later for himself and remembered what Wayne had said.